



Last Run:

The last day trip on our 2011 schedule, the Magaliesburg run on Friday, 16th December 2011 (Reconciliation Day) would be a special drive for one of our stalwart drivers. Oom Frans van Dyk would be taking his last official run on the main line railway.

He hadn't been 'boarded' by the railways or the Rail Safety Regulator (RSR), neither had he dropped the puck in an extra over-age inning, but rather chose to voluntarily retire himself due to health reasons. With problems in his legs and his back, he can no longer sit for long periods and cannot handle the physical stress of main line driving without distraction. So, Frans chose to 'call it a day' and end his multi-gauge steam career on his own terms and with dignity.



P01 – A normally fairly serious Oom Frans tips me a friendly wink in my earlier days at Reefsteamers. (12AR Locomotive No.1535.)

The last posse:

For his last run, Oom Frans van Dyk was appropriately paired-up with his steam-knuckle son, Andre. So, the last run was performed by a father-and-son team. (And a trainee fireman.) Andre is a competent and qualified fireman, and is long overdue to 'hit the books' in terms of the feared Driver Training. Unfortunately, he is kept over-busy with much of our club's marketing work and the general oversight of Reefsteamers' finances, so he doesn't have time for studying as well.



P02 – On his last main-line day, Frans let his son, Andre, take the wheel (so to speak) for some extra morning shunting. The rear auxiliary water tanker had been awkwardly placed for pre-filling and hadn't been coupled up to the train.

It would have been nice to have had Frans' steamy swan song played out on Sandstone's GMAM Garratt No. 4079 'Lyndie Lou.' It would have been cool to end a man's career on an impressive articulated machine, as Frans started his career on the diminutive 2ft gauge double-jointed bean-boilers of the Port Shepstone / Harding / Ixopo Narrow Gauge system.

From Garratt to Garratt ye go.

The GMAM has a special connection for Frans, being the opposite end of the articulated tractive spectrum. He has driven the mighty machine on the main, and also during at least one of our Depot Open Days. But the big mean green machine now restricted to the depot until her wheel profiles can be reground.

So, the 2nd tractive prize was to run the Class 15F No.3046 'Janine.' Yeah, a boring and nondescript single-frame steam locomotive with only 14 wheels, two cylinders and one full set of motion. But 'Janine' is named after Andre's daughter, Frans' granddaughter, so even the locomotive had a family connection.



P03 – A part of the family. A rake of van Dyks pose in front of the then-newly named Class 15F on 26 August 2010. The titular 'Janine' is the little girl standing right at the front.

The old steam-head and the young coal-bouncer would share the duties on the trip, so Andre could get some more experience on the high irons, and Frans could keep his elderly joints moving and seizure free. Oom Attie de Necker and Johan Breydenbach drove and fired back respectively.

Morning Brew...

The 'last steam up' was a low-key affair with locomotive servicing proceeding as usual. Servicing went quickly as the home-bound shift also mucked in with the prep. The loco-minder had done his job and the locomotive was more than ready by 6am. One mechanical glitch was sorted out – the safety stirrup for the right-side connecting rod was found to have worked a bit loose and was tightened up.

It was funny to see Andrew King, all dressed in smart semi-formal civilian gear, trying his best to wrestle those awkwardly placed bolts at arm's length to keep grease-free, until Johann B. put him out of his misery.



The extra steam was used to give the boiler a mild blow down. Because of the numbers of strays and visitors in the yard, the footplaters didn't go 'all the way' with a good lusty blow.



P04 – A gentle morning blow-down makes a grey dawn even more monochrome. Andrew King is safely in the clear but Johan Beret-bach makes a strategic retreat.

Otherwise, the only start-up glitch was the fact that the hydrostatic lubricator had either been turned on without permission or, more likely left on overnight and neither the loco-minder (me) or the fireman (Andre), or early-bird fireman (Johan) had noticed. We lost about 1/6 of our steam oil through the standing cylinders and it was fortunate that Frans noticed on his lube rounds.

In normal practice, we turn the lubricator off 5-10 minutes before we get back to the depot on a return trip to allow the oil lines to empty out. Otherwise residual oil will tend to cake-up and block the lines. So, either someone had left the lubricator running from the last trip, or someone was fiddling this morning.



P05 – From generation to generation. The trainee driver gives a trainee fireman (Simon Bennett) some tips on firing right at the back of the wide 15F firebox, through that awkward winged firing portal.

Frans was supervising the lubrication this morning and both of today's firemen were put to work anointing the 1001 lubrication points of a classic 15F. Andre did the soft greasing while Johann B. went around with an oil syringe for the MH jobs. (Mr. Beret-bach is another candidate driver trainee, if we can just get him out of mid-gear. ☺)



P06 – Checking the valve gear for any missed grease nipples. There is always at least one...

The reserve water tanker had to be shunted onto the train and it had somehow ended up on the wrong end of one of Shongololo Express's road vehicle carriers. So the early morning crews and a coach load of early passengers (boarding at the depot) were treated to some extra morning shunting.



P07 – Shunting the auxiliary water tanker in curiously monochrome light. Andre was driving and didn't couple up TOO hard. ☺ The locomotive's front coupler hadn't centralized and it missed the knuckle, but they got it hooked up on the second attempt.

Outbound:

The train trip went well apart from a slightly longer stop than expected at good old Platform 14 at Park Station. (Johannesburg.) The train was over 90% full and the passengers were still in good spirits even though the day was rapidly turning out to be a high veldt scorcher!

I didn't catch much of the outbound trip as I sneaked into a compartment for a much-needed snooze. (I'd just done the all-night loco-minding shift after all.) It was a bit embarrassing to be turfed out of bed at Jo'burg but the uneasy sleep did me some good.

As per usual, our train was a multi-ethnic train, in contradiction to those that say rail preservation activities are patroned for and addressed to Caucasian people only. (Basically, they are just playing the over-worn race card as an excuse to hinder steam activities that require more work or creativity on their behalf.)



P08 – A classic multi-ethnic coach-load of day trip passengers.

We made two stops, one at the hotel and one at the old Magaliesburg Station as usual. The picnic grounds, which have long been a bone of contention because of lack of facilities and general neglect, have been spruced up and now operate as they should.



P09 – The cattle, er, passengers, disembark at the Hotel Stop amidst the bright green of a moist high summer. Notice that the worn outer rail on the curve has recently been replaced.

We had to delay the run-around at Magaliesburg as a North-East bound diesel-hauled train was heading our way. The locomotive was safe but we had passengers crossing the main lines to get to the picnic grounds. As always we stationed the senior staffers and experienced coach crews to guard the passenger crossing and the approach to the station. (As we had the pilot with us, we knew the oncoming train was on the way long before we heard the first horn blast.)



P10 – Diesel in passing.

Scraping Ash:

Being high summer, the locomotive fire cleaning was done amongst late flowering foliage and a casually meandering flock of butterflies. The chaps cleared the tops of the rail heads first as the ash pile is encroaching on the right of way.

It seems that we need to inform the local farmers to take the loco-poop away as it is good for surfacing of dirt roads.



P11 – Servicing amongst the pretty flowers ...



P12 - ... and amongst the gritty ash.

Frans was already in some pain after the trip and wasn't allowed to participate in the heavy duties of the fire cleaning, merely exerting himself at the grate shaker. Luckily we had twice as many people as we would normally have rostered for service crew. Even though the residue was a bit heavy, with some bits of clinker in it as well, it cleaned out OK.



P13 – Oom Frans loves fire cleaning ... he can sit and watch it all day!



Frans' very last main line locomotive handover had a twist to it. The crotchety old clanker blew a gasket on the fireman's injector, which consequently just wouldn't pick up. Not only could they not top the boiler up from the fireman's side, but also couldn't open the drench valve and run the ashpan coolers. The right side injector, fortunately, works fine. The right side drench valve had to be opened with a spanner though. Some top side fire cleaning resulted with half the ash pan being sprayed down but being raked clean on both sides simultaneously.

The blown gasket was replaced in situ at lineside right opposite the candle dipping shop – with trainees holding the naked flanges apart with wedged in spanners – and the Engineering Manager still managed to keep clean except for a black smear on his chin.



P14 – A sizzling hot locomotive at rest on a classic summer scorcher of a day.

The repair job didn't take long and soon Johann Breydenbach was free to quietly grease up the hissing beast while everyone retreated to the station balcony or joined the bi-pedal wagon train to the metropolitan Magaliesburg CBD to procure provisions.

The ceremony:

We had gotten rid of the passengers for about two ½ hours and consequently settled down to have our own private braai on the lush, green station grass. Some of our members had come for the occasion by car instead of train and it was good to see them.



P15 – Drawn by the smoky scent of spicy flame-grilled meat, yellow jackets and blue-tops abound and prowl restlessly.

The actual ceremony was a low key affair – but that is probably typical for the van Dyks who don't lay on for ceremony. Andrew King had been asked to give the speech as he was expected to be the only board member there. Andrew absolutely 'LOVES' public speaking, thriving on being the center of attention and he really dazzled the crowd with his virtuoso delivery! (Not.) At least he didn't mumble and do his trademark 'Muttley wrastle.' (You'd have to be a Brit to understand.)



P16 – Andrew gropes for his notes when changing gear during his speech. Don't ask about the rose that Frans is holding ... it is better that you do not know.

Basically, the speech boiled down to a summary of Fran's steel-wheeled career right up to the present day. The speech was capped of with a sincere word of thanks for Frans' hard work at Reefsteamers for the past few years.

Appreciation:

Frans was given a framed certificate of appreciation, a framed picture of our GMAM-hauled train with him at the regulator, and a unique plaque with steam locomotive's wheel casting and a coal shovel depicted on varnished sleeper wood – very appropriate!



P17 – A surprised Frans accepts his awards.

After the booty was admired, it was time for photographs, but the passengers were already meandering back to their waiting coaches. But figuring they wouldn't come to any harm, we took some extra time out to capture the occasion.



P18 – Frans gets a handshake from our eldest driver, Oom Attie de Necker. Attie is still driving at post 70 years of age, covered by a special medical dispensation with regular medical checkups.



P19 – Van Dyk and Sons. The sequential height arrangement was purely coincidental. It is noteworthy that the smallest of the young men is the one that became the fireman. They are all well-built bruisers though and I really wouldn't like to meet THIS family in an aggro mood in a dark alleyway at night.



P20 – Surrounded by members of his Reefsteamers family, Frans looks a bit pensive. Was reality hitting him? Or was it just a bit of intestinal gas? Note that doggie Le Roux has been hoisted into the picture as well.

The trip back was enlivened by a failed start at the road crossing – the train painfully labouring at one stroke per second and the blocked road traffic getting impatient. But a gravity-assisted roll-back and then a

determined charge up the hill got us chugging on our way under the still-blazing hot 3:30pm sun.



P21 – Simon cops an eyeful as we start the charge uphill to the infamous Magaliesburg road crossing. Fireman Johann B. had already laid his fire for the grade, so there is no extra stoker action at the moment.

Johann finally rolled in the coal as we passed the abattoir and we were soon beating our way up the climbing, twisting irons.



P22 – Happiness is : Coal-scented smoke trails drifting across the sky. (Unless you've just hung out your washing, of course.)

As usual, the passengers were knackered after a sunny day out and there were lots of sleeping kids and not a few adults totally 'zonked out' along the coaches.



P23 – Pooped Princess. All played-out for the day. Her perfectly relaxed left arm was swaying gently in the train's motion.

Dancing broke out in three coaches, enlivened by our darker and usually more musical brethren – one fellow



lustily jammin' along by bopping out an intricate beat on the coach panelling.

One large mamma nearly got her arse whacked by my wide-brimmed drover's hat when she straddled two chairs across the aisle and the poor flustered trainee Coach Controller didn't know what to do. More due to luck and my bad aim, I didn't manage to flap my cranial leather against her jiggling generously-sized buns, but she got the massage, I mean, message!



P24 – Dance-out special. Jeandre, our newest trainee Coach Controller looks like he doesn't quite know what to do as dancing breaks out. The fellow in the yellow shirt was our drummer and probably loosened a few trim-strip Phillips screws in the process.

I had gotten the speech notes from the relieved Andrew and during the long hot trip home, it was worthwhile going through a summary of Frans' career.

Life on the irons:

Frans started his loco career as a firelighter in January 1956 in Greyville and had advanced to a firelighter/cleaner by that July, but at Escort. He became a fireman 14 months after he started at SAR (Feb. 1957) and would be a fireman on the distinctive SAR 2 ft narrow gauge for 8 years.

Frans wrote his Passed Fireman exam in Nov. 1964 and got the actual job promotion 4 months later and was transferred to the Port Shepstone narrow gauge system. He got his Driver Grade a year later in July 1966, but was still working primarily as a fireman.

In December 1967, he took up duties as an official driver for the first time, and was mainly doing shunting work at the Durban harbours and docks. Of course, he was now operating the 3ft 6in Cape Gaugers.

1968 was an eventful year as Frans married Helena in January and was promoted to a full time regular driver on the 2 foot gauge again, this time based at Highflats.

By 1970, Frans had been bunted out as a relief driver onto the Ixopo line roster as the Highflats depot closed down, and it looked like his career was winding down as well. But he went back to Port Shepstone Shed again, as a driver position was open once more.

After over ten years steaming along the narrow gauge, in 1981, Frans was a Toaster Tender for 6 months at Germiston, before returning to Port Shepstone to drive electrics along the beach front and the local systems. I bet he was glad to be home, even if driving a very different machine. Frans retired from Transnet service in 1993 – after 37 years of service.

Frans received awards during his service in terms of safety, never having once instigated an accident or a dangerous incident.

An engineless Frans drifted into Reefsteamers' orbit and was captured in January 2003 and was recertified as a driver in November 2006. (Well, he was actually nudged by Andre.) Those were the years that Reefsteamers were really getting into some long distance tours, so Frans got some long-running time in on the Cape Gauge steam-machines – something that he hadn't experienced much during his official time on the railways.



P25 – Keeping railways hours, but only one or twice a week, is a holiday for an old railway man. Frans is sucking MH oil into a syringe to top up the old fashioned bogie axle boxes on our class 12AR 'Susan.'

In recent years, his narrow gauge experience has been invaluable in driving the rescued 2-footers at special occasions at the Sandstone Estates and it was magic to see Frans re-united with some of those old machines.

Frans chose to retire in December 2011 – while 'on the crest of the wave' as he put it. (In English too!)

At Reefsteamers:

During his Reefsteamers service, Frans has always been one of the quieter guys. In previous years of turbulence and politics, Frans wisely deliberately chose to keep his ears open and his mouth shut. Although he had strong views himself, he successfully maintained a neutral position even when emotions were at the red line.

As an inherited trait from his many years of safe-service on the railways, Frans takes his work seriously and doesn't smile much on the job – but has a good sense of humour and is always civil. He is known to



be gentle towards the trainees too, even if they don't always move as fast as he'd like! (From various accounts, the old SAR lost many potentially good crew members by allowing footplate crews to treat their trainees poorly.)

Frans has adapted well to working in a volunteer organization – a feat that not all ex-career railwaymen, from any country or system, can achieve.

But not only does Frans work on the footplate, he found a niche role in doing Reefsteamers' carpentry. He was the person who re-fitted the Reefsteamer Lounge Car (Bar) into what it is today. He was also involved in the refit of our power van and is currently involved in the refit of Sandstone's ex-Locomotion Coach as a combined diner / snack kitchen coach.



P26 – Frans busy in the workshop. Unusually he was working with steel here, instead of wood. Frans was helping to fabricate latch frames for new gates for our extended perimeter fence project.

Because of his health issues, Frans is no longer a weekend regular at the workshops but can be sometimes seen pottering around with light duty work, usually involving wood, chipboard and coach fittings.

Frans is one of two Spoories who are brave enough to potter around on a modern motor scooter, Peter Labuscagne being the other one.



P27 – A typical Frans pose – taking charge of the Reefsteamers braai. (This photo was taken back in 2008 – this area has since been tidied up and painted.)

He is always one of the Reefsteamers 'braai-meesters' and is usually found to be hustling the incandescent carbon at club meetings, cooking the Open Day boerewors and the like.

So, what now?

Well then, please note that a certain 'ou Spoorie' is not quite ready for scrapping just yet. We will simply back off the safety valve springs to run him at a reduced boiler pressure and assign him lighter duties. We can't push him too hard with his cracked frames and creaking joints. He needs to be stoked on regular portions of good food and needs regular lubrication with the drinks of his choice.

Frans will retire to be a shunter / shedman type person at the Reefsteamers depot and even then, will often have his trainees do the heavier work. If Frans no longer runs on the main line, he will eventually lose his driver's certification and will be required to stay on the depot rails. But he is amply qualified for the depot-based work.



P29 – Frans and Andre have just brought their narrow gauge train back home, using the Sandstone Kalahari. (Maluti Magic 2009)

Fran's motion and frames are giving him trouble but his arms and hands are still good, and his mind is as sharp as ever. Thus, this retirement is just a change of pace, rather than sadly walking away from the buffers at the proverbial end of the line and giving up.

Frans will still be involved at Reefsteamers amongst his friends, fellow steamed fruitcakes and his family. He is still going to working amongst the great living steam machines that have become such an integral part of his life.

In other words, this article is intend to remember this time as a time of thanks and of recognition, rather than a good-bye. I was wondering how many people attending the end-of-service ceremony at Magaliesburg understood that.



P28 – Always safety conscious, Frans checks that his lineside is clear as he shunts some passenger coaches amongst onlookers during one of our 2010 Open Days.

Frans has voluntarily retired earlier with dignity, not hanging on to the very last moment, or through being driven onwards by his ego - hurting himself, or possibly others in the process. Ironically, in so doing, he has extended his years of service and will continue to have an active, if somewhat less strenuous role in the 'good fight' of the preservation of South African steam.



P30 – A relatively rare unselfconscious smile from Oom Frans as he does what he enjoys the most. In this picture, he is waiting for the 'off' to back the locomotive into the coal dock.

But for now, we need to be considerate and let a somewhat creaky railway man enjoy his well earned rest!

Dankie Oom Frans!



P31 – Hush now! Let a retired driver catch up on his much needed sleep.

